

Congresswoman

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

Representing New York's 12th Congressional District

Ranking Democratic Member, House Small Business Committee



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NYC Small Businesses Need Assistance Following Blackout

Relief for New York small businesses adversely affected by the 2003 blackout was requested by Congresswoman Velázquez from the Small Business Administration (SBA) in the form of disaster loans.

"The repercussions of the 2003 power outage were felt throughout our city and state, as many small businesses are struggled to restart their operations and recover from revenue losses," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "In leaving many of New York's small companies without electricity or clean water for several days, the blackout has severely impacted their near-term profitability and jeopardized their long-term financial future."

Among those small businesses most affected by the blackout were restaurants, grocery stores, and other food service companies that rely on perishable goods and clean water. Many of these businesses were not equipped with backup generators and lost millions of dollars in spoiled food stocks. It is reported that the blackout cost area restaurants \$100 million in revenue

losses and the city overall lost approximately \$750 million in revenue.

Congresswoman Velázquez is called on the president and the SBA Administrator, Hector Barreto, to provide federal disaster loans to struggling businesses in both New York City and the other areas hard hit by the 2003 blackout. SBA disaster loans play a pivotal role in preserving the financial health of our nation's local economies by permitting small businesses to access capital and stave off bankruptcy when disaster strikes.

"Small businesses are the backbone of New York's economy, making up the large majority of companies and creating three-fourths of all new jobs," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "First, small businesses were hard hit by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, then there was the SARS scare, and now the blackout – all during a time when both our city's economy – and our nation's as a whole – remain in a downturn. Small businesses are key players in our economic recovery, but we need to give them the right tools – and the SBA disaster loans would certainly be one of them."

Velázquez Decries Section 8 Voucher Program During Rally

Congresswoman Velázquez spoke out against the cuts made to the Section 8 Voucher program by the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans during a rally in her district.

"Today, we face countless uncertainties as a nation, as New Yorkers, and as neighbors," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "Homelessness is at a 10-year high and housing costs continue to skyrocket. Now, in the midst of this housing crisis – with nearly 150,000 families on a closed waiting list for Section 8 vouchers in New York City – the president and his fellow Republicans are once again slashing funding for Section 8 vouchers."

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently released figures indicating that the costs of Section 8 vouchers have risen, meaning that Republican cuts to Section 8 are even more severe. It is estimated that it will potentially deny assistance to 100,000 families. This is the first time in the 30-year history of the Section 8 program that vouchers have actually failed to be renewed.

In an attempt to offset the deep cuts, Congresswoman Velázquez successfully restored funding to the Section 8 Voucher program, providing an additional \$150 million to restore nearly 22,000 vouchers through a congressional spending bill.

"Since coming to Congress more than a decade ago, I have consistently fought for the rights of low-income families," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "And I will continue to work to increase our nation's commitment to providing safe, affordable housing for every American. We are up against a strong opposition and stark economic conditions – but we are determined and we are right. President Bush has been traveling the



Congresswoman Velázquez talks to residents during a Section 8 housing rally.

country, touting his economic stimulus plan. I urge him to come here, to meet the families in New York, and see the economic realities of his housing policies."

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program provides vouchers that allow families the flexibility to receive government subsidized rental housing in the private market. In New York City, there are approximately 105,000 vouchers serving more than 200,000 residents.

Request for Federal Investigation into EPA Following 9/11

Congresswoman Velázquez called for a federal investigation into the inconsistencies of public health information released by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

"Since the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, I have continuously called upon the EPA to undertake immediate measures to evaluate and mitigate the effects of the World Trade Center plume on Brooklyn residents," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "The EPA repeatedly assured my office and local residents that the air quality was safe, and that clean up efforts did not need to be expanded into Brooklyn. However, the EPA Inspector General recently released a scathing report documenting the administration's efforts to mislead New York residents about the health risks they faced in the weeks and months following the terrorist attacks."

The EPA denied any deception in response to the report and claimed that virtually all of the Inspector General's recommendations were already being implemented

before the report was released. Due to the discrepancies in information, and the serious health consequences for New York residents, Congresswoman Velázquez requested that the General Accounting Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, to look into the situation for answers.

In her request, she asked for an evaluation of the accuracy of public information by EPA regarding the air quality and health risks for New York City residents in the weeks and months following September 11. In addition, she asked for a determination of the extent to which all of the recommendations in the EPA Inspector General's report were being implemented, specifically including an evaluation of the potential health risks of pollutants in workplaces and areas north of Canal Street and in Brooklyn. Congresswoman Velázquez also asked for a review of preparedness improvements that EPA had implemented in the past 2 years, and an analysis of EPA's current capacity to effectively respond to other possible disasters of this magnitude.

Grants Workshop Offers Advice on Obtaining Funding

A free grants workshop was hosted by Congresswoman Velázquez along with officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the New York City Department of Aging and the Foundation Center.

"Members of local organizations are looking for creative ways to finance their programs today, and this workshop was a wonderful opportunity for them to gain this knowledge," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "A decrease in funding has been felt by all levels of government, making financing programs difficult. But there are grants available and I will continue to work to ensure that the residents in my district are aware of possible funding sources. These organizations provide extremely valuable services to our

community and they deserve to be able to continue to flourish."

The groups joined together to discuss future funding opportunities and to provide tips on grant proposal writing. Representatives from the Foundation Center were present to discuss grant proposal writing for foundations. The workshop offered alternative solutions to helping local organizations locate monetary assistance during a time when many are experiencing decreases in funding.

Congresswoman Velázquez distributes a federal grants alert every two weeks to local organizations in her district.

Velázquez Meets with Project Reach Youth Organization

Congresswoman Velázquez recently met with staff of the Project Reach Youth (PRY) organization. The local organization honored Velázquez for her commitment to education earlier this year.

"Providing opportunity and resources for education is extremely important in ensuring the well-being and stability of our community now and in the future," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "And education for young people can determine the course they take in life. I will continue to push for federal funds so PRY can continue to provide innovative programming that touches the lives of thousands of young people in our community every year."

Congresswoman Velázquez had requested \$110 million in funding for two critically important federal community technology programs that benefit PRY, the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) and the Community Technology Centers (CTC) Initiative. Both of these programs had been cut in President Bush's budget.

Staff members of PRY met with the Congresswoman to discuss ways to work together. Velázquez met with parents and children attending summer camp, one of the many programs offered by PRY.

"PRY has been a resource for our neighborhood's youth and families," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "Their programming keeps children



Project Reach Youth Executive Director, Robert Madison, and Congresswoman Velázquez speak to children attending a PRY youth summer camp.

and families involved in their communities. I will fight for funding for this organization that has proven their success in nurturing our youth and providing them with educational and leadership initiatives."

Grants Awarded to Our Community

Department of Health and Human Services
Lutheran Medical Center -- \$40,000
for consolidated health center programs

Department of Health and Human Services
Sunset Park Business Improvement District -- \$178,830
for facade renovations, sidewalk, curb and street renovations

Department of Health and Human Services
New York City -- \$33,740,099
to hospitals for terrorism preparedness and other public health emergencies

Department of Education
New York State -- \$597,207,574
to provide free appropriate public education to all children with disabilities

Department of Health and Human Services
New York City Administration for Children's Services -- \$14,786,335
for the Head Start program

Department of Health and Human Services
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene -- \$745,281
grants to provide childhood immunizations and vaccines